

Management Intensive Grazing: An Overview

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Livestock producers can be viewed as “grass farmers.” They produce the best quality and quantity of forage on a piece of land and harvest the forage with livestock. The level of productivity depends not only on how much forage is produced, but how efficiently it is harvested.

Grazing animals select the most desirable plants and avoid others. Controlled grazing is the process of moving a herd of livestock from one pasture to another and allowing each pasture a period of rest before it is grazed again. This approach to grazing is also known as rotational or management intensive grazing. Emphasis is placed on management rather than the system or its components. This form of grazing management is gaining popularity because of the need to increase production efficiency to cover the high cost of land, labor, and operating expenses.

Compared to continuous grazing, which is the most widely practiced approach, controlled grazing requires a higher level of management. The efficiency of the grazing system

depends on the amount of time, labor, and money invested in it.

Changing from continuous to controlled grazing allows livestock producers to (1) increase stocking rates, (2) extend the grazing season, (3) increase nutrient recycling, (4) decrease labor, and (5) improve animal health and potentially lower parasite loads.

The management of a controlled grazing system revolves around the period of rest plants receive during the growing season. During the rest period, plants are allowed to recover from grazing and produce new growth. The length of rest varies with season and forage species and is based upon the amount of above-ground growth (residual dry matter) remaining in the pasture after the animals are removed.



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